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Author(s): Gemma A Keep

Title: A 'head' of their time: The influence of phrenology on nineteenth-century
literature

Date: 2014

Originally published as: University of Chester MA dissertation

Example citation: Keep, G. A. (2014). *A 'head' of their time: The influence of
phrenology on nineteenth-century literature*. (Unpublished master's thesis).
University of Chester, United Kingdom.

Version of item: Submitted version

Available at: <http://hdl.handle.net/10034/337844>

University of Chester
Department of English

MA Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture

EN7204 Dissertation
2013-2014

A 'Head' of their Time:
The Influence of Phrenology on Nineteenth-Century Literature

J10428

Abstract

This dissertation assesses the impact of phrenology on nineteenth-century literature. It specifically focuses on texts by Mary Ann Evans, Charlotte Brontë, Florence Nightingale and Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

In the introduction, the popularity of phrenology will be established followed by the key phrenological principles which are mainly sourced from George Combe's *The Constitution of Man*. The introduction focuses on providing context and evidence to demonstrate the applicability of this argument. In particular, this dissertation looks at women who used phrenology positively as evidence for their innate intellectual faculties.

Chapter one analyses Mary Ann Evans's *Middlemarch* through a phrenological lens, assessing how phrenology influenced her characterisation and views on patriarchal society. This chapter has a specific focus on Dorothea and her perceptions of her position as a woman and the idea that an active life and knowledge are masculine privileges. Chapter two demonstrates the influence of phrenology on Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor* and *Villette*, focusing on the differences between the two protagonists and the influence of the gender assumptions in nineteenth-century society. Chapter three uses Andrew Combe's *Observations on Mental Derangement*, Florence Nightingale's 'Cassandra' and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper' to demonstrate how phrenology highlighted the impact of passivity on women's mental health.

All chapters begin by establishing each author's awareness of phrenology to provide context and creditability for the argument which follows in each chapter.

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Introduction

Phrenology: 'the nineteenth century's most popular and popularised "science"'¹

The majority of research into the influence of phrenology in the nineteenth century has been focused on discrediting its core principles and its subjection of women. This dissertation offers an alternative perspective by exploring the ways in which women responded to phrenology positively and used it as a platform to prove their innate intellectual abilities. The theories of phrenology later developed into craniology, a philosophy based on racial theories led by Cesare Lombroso in the late nineteenth century; however this dissertation focuses on the core concepts of phrenology, mostly sourced from George Combe's *The Constitution of Man* (1828). I will analyse Mary Ann Evans's *Middlemarch* (1874); Charlotte Brontë's *The Professor* (1857) and *Villette* (1853); Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper' (1892); and Florence Nightingale's 'Cassandra' (1879) through a phrenological lens to demonstrate how phrenology influenced nineteenth-century literature. To prove the applicability of my approach; the history, key figures, and popularity of phrenology will be established to provide context and evidence for the creditability of my argument.

The origins of phrenology trace back to German physiologist Franz Josef Gall (1758-1828). Gall sought to intertwine faculty psychology and his interest in human character differences. The definition of 'faculty' is power: 'of persons: an ability or aptitude, whether natural or acquired, for any special kind of action; formerly also, ability, 'parts', capacity in general'.² Faculty psychology studies the powers of the brain. Around 1800, Gall's findings were considered under the term 'cranioscopy' or 'organology' as he attempted to localise the different parts of human character in specific regions of the brain based on an individual's physical form and the physiological

¹ Roger Cooter, *The Cultural Meaning of Popular Science: Phrenology and the Organization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 2.

² <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/67547?redirectedFrom=faculty#eid> [Accessed 09/09/2014]

structure of their brain. Gall states: 'my purpose is to ascertain the functions of the brain in general [...] to show that it is possible to ascertain different dispositions and inclination by the elevations and depressions upon the head'.³ Although Gall failed to locate all of the faculties added to the phrenological framework we see used in later phrenological readings, one key anatomical finding which remained constant throughout the development of phrenology was the notion that faculties are 'essentially distinct and independent' and 'have their seat in parts of the brain distinct and independent of each other'.⁴

The next key individual in the development of phrenology was German physician Johann Gasper Spurzheim (1776-1832) who became a disciple of Gall in 1800 after meeting him in Vienna. Referred to as 'the bearer rather than the inventor' of phrenology, Spurzheim introduced phrenology to England as he separated from Gall in Vietnam in 1813 and moved to Scotland.⁵ Spurzheim's most notable contribution to phrenology were his additions to the list of faculties; increasing Gall's list of twenty seven to thirty five. These organs were subdivided and numbered hierarchically: sexual love, or 'amativeness', was considered most inferior and is located at the nape of the neck alongside other animal propensities; causality, an intellectual faculty, was most superior; situated at the forefront in the centre of the forehead. Spurzheim also popularised the term 'phrenology': 'phren' the ancient Greek work for brain and 'ology' defined as the study of.⁶ He included the term in his most notable works: *Phrenology: Or, the Doctrine of the Mind* (1825) and *Phrenology: Philosophical part* (1832). Charles Savage notes that Spurzheim spread the knowledge of phrenology by delivering phrenology lectures in many large towns throughout Great Britain before travelling to

³ Franz Josef Gall, *On the Functions of the Brain and of Each of its Parts* Volume 1 (Boston: Marsh, Capon & Lyon, 1835), p. 7.

⁴ Gall, *On the Functions of the Brain*, p. 11.

⁵ Cooter, *The Cultural Meaning of Popular Science*, p. 51

⁶ <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/233493?rskey=5TDkRw&result=1#eid> [accessed 19th August 2014]

Paris, New York and Boston where he 'was received with great eagerness and cordiality by all classes'.⁷

The most renowned and celebrated individual in the phrenological movement was George Combe (1788-1858) whose interest in phrenology originated in 1816 after attending multiple brain dissections carried out by Spurzheim in Edinburgh. His gradual appreciation of this 'science' grew to a passionate advocating of Spurzheim and phrenology; in 1824 he wrote to Spurzheim: 'I love you' and 'love phrenology'.⁸ Within a year of first meeting Spurzheim, Combe began producing multiple phrenological texts, constructing articles based on the works of Gall and Spurzheim which were published in *The Literary and Statistical Magazine* in 1818 and 1819.⁹ His first book *Essays on Phrenology* (1819) was described by Spurzheim as 'the most able defence of the doctrine in the British Empire'.¹⁰ The book was a popular success: by 1821, 500 of the 750 printed copies had been sold, leading to positive reviews appearing in the *Edinburgh Monthly Review* and the *New Edinburgh Review*.¹¹ Combe founded the Edinburgh Phrenology Society in 1820 which launched the *Phrenological Journal* in 1823. Like Spurzheim, Combe lectured on phrenology; beginning with a small number of 11 attendees in the spring of 1822 to filling a hall seating 120 people which was 'crowded to the rear' just a few months later in November 1822.¹² His bestselling work titled *Constitution of Man in Relation to External Objects* (1828) was based on fundamental phrenological principles; outlining the natural laws which needed to be abided by in order to achieve harmony of the mental faculties which would allow humankind to achieve happiness and a higher level of thinking.

⁷ Charles C. Savage, *Illustrated biography; or, Memoirs of the great and good of all nations and all times* (New York: Phinney & Co., 1856), pp. 529-530.

⁸ David Stack, *Queen Victoria's Skull: George Combe and the Mid-Victorian Mind* (London: Continuum, 2008), p. 48.

⁹ Stack, *Queen Victoria's Skull*, p. 259.

¹⁰ Stack, *Queen Victoria's Skull*, p. 49.

¹¹ Stack, *Queen Victoria's Skull*, p. 49.

¹² Stack, *Queen Victoria's Skull*, p. 52.

Combe is referred to as the populariser of phrenology, due to the success of his phrenological texts, specifically the *Constitution of Man*. The widespread awareness and popularity of phrenology is demonstrated by the *Constitution's* record number of sales. At the time of its first publication in 1828, Combe's readers were limited to the small number of those actively interested in phrenology. The publishers W. & R. Chambers accurately proposed that a larger audience could be reached if the price of the publication was lowered. This move proved successful: after cutting down the price to a fifth of its original price, they had sold 43,000 copies by the end of 1836 and 85,000 by 1850.¹³ In 1841, the *Spectator* argued that the sales of the *Constitution* ensured 'the seepage of phrenology into every chink and cranny of public opinion'.¹⁴ By 1900 it had sold approximately 350,000 copies being 'outstripped in all time readership only by the *Bible*, *Pilgrims Progress* and *Robinson Crusoe*'.¹⁵ To add perspective, Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* had sold 47,000 copies by 1895 and therefore Combe's text was far more widely read and discussed and became one of four texts expected to be seen on a nineteenth-century book shelf.¹⁶

The belief in Combe's creditability demonstrates that phrenology transcended the widely held assumption that it was solely based on lumps and bumps. Combe refers to the *Constitution* as 'an essay on education'.¹⁷ He calls phrenology 'the true philosophy of the mind'.¹⁸ His text is based on acknowledging and cooperating with natural physical, organic and moral laws. These laws are structured hierarchically, with moral law considered as most superior. To begin with the physical and organic laws, the

¹³ James A. Secord, *Visions of Science: Books and Readers at the Dawn of the Victorian Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 193.

¹⁴ Margaret Harris (ed.), *George Eliot in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 266.

¹⁵ Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 63.

¹⁶ Robert M. Young, *Darwin's Metaphor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 4.

¹⁷ George Combe, *The Constitution of Man in Relation to External Objects* 11th American edition (Boston: Marsh, Capen, Lyon and Webb, 1841), p. 390.

¹⁸ Combe, *The Constitution*, p. 21.

Constitution states that ‘the Physical Laws embrace all the phenomena of mere matter’ and ‘the Organic Laws [...] mean the established modes according to which all phenomena connected with the production, health, growth, decay, and death, of vegetables and animals take place’.¹⁹ The moral law states that ‘the mental faculties have received precise constitution, have been fixed and definite relations to external objects, and act regularly; - we speak of their acting according to rules or laws, and call these the Moral and Intellectual Laws’.²⁰ Combe argues that the moral law includes ‘virtue, religion, and happiness’ which are founded ‘in the inherent constitution of the human faculties, and the adaptation of the external world to them; and not to depend on the will, the fancies, or the desires of man’.²¹ An individual that abides by the moral laws is more capable of conforming to and understanding all three. This rewards individuals with the highest degree of happiness possible for humankind:

The man who cultivates his intellect, and habitually obeys the precepts of Christianity, will enjoy within himself a fountain of *moral and intellectual happiness*, which is the reward of that obedience. By these means he will be rendered more capable of studying, comprehending, and obeying, the physical and organic laws, or placing himself in harmony with the whole order of creation, and of attaining the highest degree of perfection and reaping the highest degree of happiness.²²

These laws ‘operate *independently of each other*’ and ‘*obedience to each law is attended with its own reward, and disobedience with its own punishment*’.²³ In order to fulfil faculties to their full capacity individuals must use them: ‘the best mode of increasing the strength and energy of any organ and function, is to exercise them regularly and judiciously’.²⁴ This notion is key and will be referred to in each of the chapters in this dissertation.

In order to conform to the laws listed above, individuals must cultivate and

¹⁹ Combe, *The Constitution*, p. 32.

²⁰ Combe, *The Constitution*, p. 32.

²¹ Combe, *The Constitution*, p. 310.

²² Combe, *The Constitution*, p. 23.

²³ Combe, *The Constitution*, pp. 21-22.

²⁴ Combe, *The Constitution*, p. 131.

‘exercise’ all of their faculties to control and curb the animal propensities. The anatomical basis for Combe’s *Constitution* features the findings of Gall and Spurzheim:

According to Phrenology, then, the human faculties are the following. The organs are double, each faculty having two, lying in corresponding situations of the hemispheres of the brain [...] the organs differ in relative size in different individuals, and hence their differences of talents and dispositions [...] every faculty stands in a definite relation to certain external objects: when it is internally active it desires these objects; when they are presented to it they excite it to activity, and delight it with agreeable sensations.

The list of the thirty five faculties and their location in the brain is presented in the *Constitution* as follows:

Order 1. Feelings

Genus I. Propensities –
Common to Man with the Lower Animals.

1. Amativeness
2. Philoprogenitiveness
3. Concentrativeness
4. Adhesiveness
5. Combativeness
6. Destructiveness
7. Secretiveness
8. Acquisitiveness
9. Constructiveness

Genus II. Sentiments

10. Self-Esteem
11. Love of Approbation
12. Cautiousness
13. Benevolence

II. Sentiments Proper to Man

14. Veneration
15. Firmness
16. Conscientiousness
17. Hope
18. Wonder
19. Ideality
20. Wit
21. Imitation

Order II. Intellectual faculties

Genus II. Knowing faculties which perceive the existence and qualities of external objects

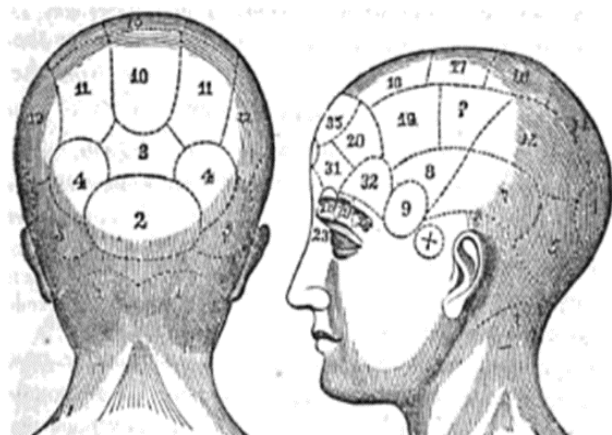


Fig. 1: Location of animal propensities²⁵

²⁵ Combe, *The Constitution*, p. 53.

- 22. Individuality
- 23. Form
- 24. Size
- 25. Weight
- 26. Colouring

Genus III Knowing faculties which perceive the relations of external objects

- 27. Locality
- 28. Number
- 29. Order
- 30. Eventuality
- 31. Time
- 32. Tune
- 33. Language

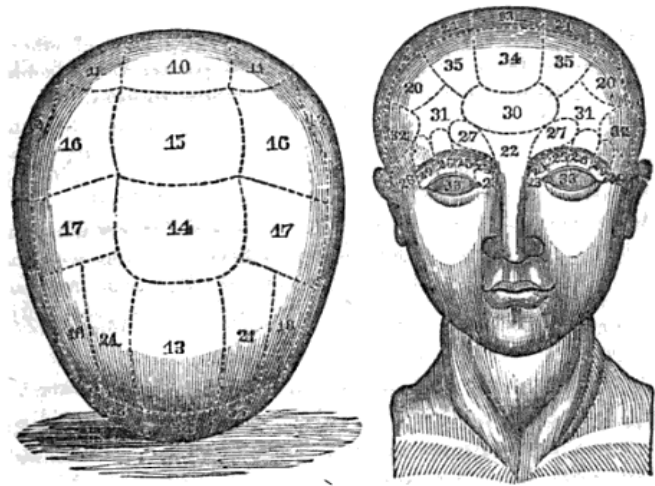


Fig. 2: Location of Higher Intellectual Faculties²⁶

Genus IV. Reflecting faculties, which compare, judge, and discriminate

- 34. Comparison
- 35. Causality²⁷

Combe argued that cultivation of the moral and intellectual faculties was vital in order to gain control over the animal propensities:

The great distinction between animal faculties and the powers proper to man is, that the former do not prompt us to seek the welfare of mankind at large: their object is chiefly the preservation of the individual himself, his family, or his tribe; which the latter have the general happiness of the human race, and our duties to God, as their ends.²⁸

According to Combe, the animal propensities seek pleasure for the individual only, operating with disregard for 'the welfare of mankind at large'. The animal faculties consider 'self-preservation and self-gratification as their leading objects'.²⁹ Therefore, the animal propensities 'must be restrained in their desires, and directed to their objects by the moral sentiments, and by intellect, otherwise they will inevitably lead to disappointment'.³⁰ This leads to the argument that 'happiness, therefore, must be viewed by men as connected with the exercise of the three great classes of faculties; the moral sentiments and intellect exercising the directing and controlling sway, before it can be

²⁶ Combe, *The Constitution*, p. 55.

²⁷ Combe, *The Constitution*, pp. 52-56.

²⁸ Combe, *The Constitution*, p. 60.

²⁹ Combe, *The Constitution*, p. 69.

³⁰ Combe, *The Constitution*, p. 73.

permanently attained'.³¹

For Combe, the human mind battles against conflicting desires and achieving harmony is his main concern:

Right conduct is *that which is approved of by the whole moral and intellectual faculties, fully enlightened, and acting in harmonious combination*. This I call the supremacy of the moral sentiments and intellect. (p.59)

The reading of heads decodes the skull's formation to reveal the subject's weaknesses and strengths. According to Combe, the phrenologist 'desires only to see their excesses controlled, and their exercise directed in accordance with the great institutions and designs of the Creator'.³²

To paraphrase Combe's *Constitution*, 'exercise' and cultivation of the higher intellectual and moral faculties was key in order to control the animal instincts. This could be achieved by a variety of stimuli which engage distinct faculties, causing them to grow and develop as God intended. Repeated 'exercise' of each faculty enabled it to be fulfilled to its capacity which was endowed to the individual from birth.

The sales of Combe's *Constitution* demonstrates that nineteenth-century society credited Combe's intellect and 'scientific' philosophy. Responses to Combe as a person were, on the whole, positive. His social circle is depicted as elite, consisting of thought provoking intellectuals. One insight into Combe's company is provided in Kate Summerscale's *Mrs Robinson's Disgrace: The Private Diary of a Victorian Lady* (2012) which is based on a diary kept by Mrs Isabella Robinson. Her relationship with Combe began after he read her skull in Edinburgh: her large faculty of 'amativeness' was noted to be the most dominant.³³ Summerscale notes that 'by decoding her constitution, Isabella hoped to adjust it, enlisting the higher faculties – the intellectual and moral

³¹ Combe, *The Constitution*, p. 78.

³² Combe, *The Constitution*, pp. 81-82.

³³ Kate Summerscale, *Mrs Robinson's Disgrace: The Private Diary of a Victorian Lady* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2002), p. 31.

sentiments – to contain and control the unruly parts of her brain'.³⁴ In addition to believing in Combe's philosophy, Isabella's desire to socially interact with Combe is evident:

'You do not know how often I wish I could see you and converse with you', she wrote to Combe, 'or how much I miss the intelligence and earnestness of the little circle I used to meet either in your house, or in those of your friends'.³⁵

The celebrity status of Combe is demonstrated by Combe's visit to Moor Park, where Summerscale states that 'one patient, a sixty-year-old widow from Aberdeenshire, begged a lock of hair from Combe' (p.130). Combe's opinions regarding education and schooling were also sought by Isabella. Furthermore, her husband Henry based the establishment of his school on the "secular school' that Combe had founded in Edinburgh, which taught science instead of theology".³⁶

Combe's phrenological readings and opinions on schooling were also sought by the most powerful family of the nineteenth century, the British Royal Family, headed by Queen Victoria. David Stack paints the scene: 'In May 1852 Combe was ushered into the nursery of Queen Victoria's two eldest daughters [...] their Governess, explained to the children that 'Dr' Combe, as she mistakenly titled him, had come to examine the 'bumps' on their heads'.³⁷ Stack notes that Combe returned the next day to report to Prince Albert and 'a familiarity had grown between the two men since Combe's first visit to the Palace back in 1846'.³⁸ The trust placed in Combe's opinion is explicit: several individuals employed to educate the royal children were instructed to read Combe's phrenological texts, including the *Constitution*. Ernst Becker, who was employed as the German tutor for their son Edward, spent three months undergoing phrenological training with Combe in Edinburgh.³⁹ The fact that Combe's involvement

³⁴ Summerscale, *Mrs Robinson's Disgrace*, p. 33.

³⁵ Summerscale, *Mrs Robinson's Disgrace*, p. 46.

³⁶ Summerscale, *Mrs Robinson's Disgrace*, p. 43.

³⁷ Stack, *Queen Victoria's Skull*, p. 175.

³⁸ Stack, *Queen Victoria's Skull*, p. 175.

³⁹ Stack, *Queen Victoria's Skull*, p. 177.

with the royal family continued until Prince Edward turned seventeen shows that his phrenological theories and readings, as well as his advice concerning education, were widely sought after.

Combe's involvement with education and the position of women reveals his place in nineteenth-century society as multidimensional. Combe argued that education was paramount to an individual's success. By arguing that female and male brain structure were essentially the same, phrenology promoted the idea that women were born intellectual equal to men. Spurzheim argued that 'the intellectual faculties of women resemble those of men'.⁴⁰ The issue was that women were not provided with the opportunity to 'exercise' these higher organs. Shuttleworth argues that for women, phrenology 'offered exciting new visions of social power and control; extending the horizons of social possibility'.⁴¹ One notable female response to Combe's *Constitution* is Margracia Loudon. Her friend's recommendation of Combe's *Constitution* in 1835 had a profound effect on Loudon. Secord notes that Loudon 'read the book three times', and reported:

Never was I so entirely delighted with any book. That one small volume seems to me to compromise more wisdom, of a kind practically applicable to the production of human happiness, than all the ponderous works put together that I have ever met with.⁴²

Another representative of a 'pro' phrenology female was Scottish phrenology lecturer Mrs Hamilton who toured the United Kingdom in the 1830s. Reports state that she delivered 'to a crowded audience of both sexes' who were 'very attentive'.⁴³ In one particular lecture, Hamilton argued that phrenology confirmed mental equality of the sexes and subsequently gave women the 'power to break the chains of the tyrant and the

⁴⁰ Johann Gaspar Spurzheim, *Phrenology* Volume 2 (Boston: Marsh, Capen and Lyon, 1834), p. 82.

⁴¹ Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology*, p. 65.

⁴² Secord, *Visions of Science*, p. 178.

⁴³ *The Phrenological Journal, and Magazine of Moral Science*, Volume 13 (Edinburgh: MacLachlan, Stewart & Company, 1840), p. 188.

oppressor and set [women] completely free'.⁴⁴ This strong statement provides another example of how the revelation of equal intellectual faculties in women triggered demands for chances to 'exercise' their given faculties within the brain through education and other social institutions.

Other women who were actively involved with phrenology include Mrs Thomas Spurr, author of a course of lectures, Mrs John S. D. Pugh, Mrs L. Miles, and the women which each chapter of this dissertation is dedicated to: Mary Ann Evans, Charlotte Brontë, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Florence Nightingale. Chapter one will demonstrate Evans's awareness of phrenology; explore her relationship with George Combe; apply a phrenological analysis to *Middlemarch*, focussing on Evans's characterisation on Dorothea, and examine the gendered roles which hindered her phrenological development. Chapter two will focus on Brontë's interest in phrenology; compare Brontë's protagonists of *The Professor* and *Villette* and argue that both are products of their society; conscious of conforming to the active/male - passive/female ideal that was prevalent in the nineteenth century. This ideal stands in opposition to the ideas of phrenology which sought to help women develop their minds and enhance their phrenological structures. Chapter three will link phrenology to ideas of women's madness in the nineteenth century by discussing George's brother Andrew Combe's work, *Observations on Mental Derangement* (1831), alongside Nightingale's 'Cassandra' and Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper'. Nightingale and Gilman's awareness of, and use of phrenology in their texts enabled them to offer accounts of the realities of life for women who were denied access to resources which could stimulate their higher intellectual faculties. They focus on enforced passivity which had a negative impact on women's mental wellbeing.

⁴⁴ Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 21.

Chapter one

Phrenology in *Middlemarch*

In this chapter I argue that readers could gain a fuller understanding of *Middlemarch* through an awareness of Mary Ann Evans's interest in phrenology and her relationship with phrenology's populariser, George Combe: this knowledge contextualises nineteenth-century society's attitudes towards brain activity and mental development which influenced Evans's characterisation. The basis for my argument stems from Evans's personal life and therefore this chapter uses her birth name rather than her penname, George Eliot. My phrenological reading of *Middlemarch* argues that while phrenology states that women would benefit as much as men given the opportunity to 'exercise' their intellectual faculties, patriarchal nineteenth-century society held that women were intellectually inferior by nature and therefore women were prevented from developing their intellectual faculties. After establishing Evans's interest in phrenology, this chapter will focus on the women in the text, with specific attention given to Dorothea; direct connections with Combe's *Constitution* will be made throughout; active male characters will be explored; and Casaubon's illness and death, the result of overexertion, will be analysed. Nineteenth-century gender roles will be discussed: active/male passive/female; and the influence of these roles on individual development is at the forefront of this chapter.

Rosemary Ashton's biography of Mary Ann Evans includes a section on Evans's role as the unofficial editor of the *Westminster Review*, published by radical John Chapman. Evans's account of a meeting attended by an eclectic group of acclaimed male figures, including Charles Dickens, Thomas Carlyle and John Stuart Mill, to name but a few, demonstrates her interest in phrenology. In a letter to Charles and Cara Bray on 5th May 1852 Evans writes: 'Dickens in the chair [...] no benevolence in the face and

I think little in the head – the anterior lobe not by any means remarkable'.⁴⁵ Evans's use of phrenology to give the Brays an impression of Dickens demonstrates her knowledge, and their shared knowledge, of phrenological ideas. Charles Bray, in particular, influenced Evans's interest in phrenology. He was described by Gordon Haight as one of Evans's 'most intimate friends',⁴⁶ and a keen phrenologist, described by Leslie Stephen as a 'disciple of George Combe'.⁴⁷ Bray argued that phrenology was 'the machinery by and through which the "soul of each and God of All" worked such wonderfully varied but invariable effects'.⁴⁸ In July 1844, Bray took Evans to London where she had a cast made of her head by James Denville. This cast was sent to George Combe for analysis and Bray notes that Combe's first observation was that: 'Miss Evans's head is a very large one'.⁴⁹ So large, in fact, that Combe mistook it for a man's.⁵⁰ A month later, Combe and Evans met for the first time through Bray.

On 29th August 1851, George Combe met a 'Miss Evans' at Bray's ribbon factory in Rosehill, Coventry.⁵¹ In his journal for the day of their first meeting, Combe stated that 'Miss Evans [was] the most extraordinary person of the party'.⁵² His phrenological reading of Evans's head was documented:

She has a very large brain, the anterior lobe is remarkable for length, breadth and height, the coronal region is large, the front rather predominating; the base is broad at Destruc[tiveness] [...] the portion behind the ear is rather small in the region of Comb[ativeness] and Amat[iveness].⁵³

Combe's admiration of Evans is clear: 'she appeared to me the ablest woman whom I have seen' and her intellectual capabilities were coupled with an 'extremely feminine

⁴⁵ Rosemary Ashton, *George Eliot: A Life* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1997), p. 3.

⁴⁶ Gordon Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography* (New York: Penguin Books, 1986), p. 37.

⁴⁷ Leslie Stephen, *George Eliot* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 22.

⁴⁸ Haight, *George Eliot*, p. 37.

⁴⁹ Haight, *George Eliot*, p. 51.

⁵⁰ Haight, *George Eliot*, p. 51.

⁵¹ Gordon Haight, *The George Eliot Letters* Volume VIII 1840-1870 (New Haven: Yale University, 1978), p. 27

⁵² Haight, *Letters*, p. 27.

⁵³ Haight, *Letters*, p. 27.

and gentle' aura.⁵⁴ Subsequent letters between Combe and Evans portray a reciprocated relationship: Evans wrote to Combe in January 1852 to say that she could not 'regret an opportunity of renewing by letter an intercourse which was so agreeable to me in person'.⁵⁵ A month later, she was keen to express 'a great interest and admiration, as I have done everything else proceeding from your pen'.⁵⁶ Fuller correspondence followed and Evans's responses show she valued their friendship. On 30th March 1852 she writes to Combe: 'I often think of you, when I want some one to whom I could confess all my difficulties and struggles with my own nature'.⁵⁷ It is apparent that Evans regarded Combe as a trustworthy, loyal and helpful confidant. Furthermore, she considered him to be intellectually superior:

I assure you that your correspondence would be very valuable to me, even if it were nothing more than the expression of sympathy from such a mind as yours - but it is much more than this – for your suggestions are a help practically. So long therefore as you can spare time and effort to write you will be doing me a real good.⁵⁸

Evans's admiration for 'a mind as yours' suggests that she thought Combe had an advanced way of thinking that could have pragmatic benefits for her. Their friendship also became a working relationship as Evans was an editor of Combe's paper titled 'Criminal Legislation and Prison Reform' between January and March 1854.

Evans's involvement with Combe's writing and her role as editor of Combe's work demonstrates a reciprocated respect for each other's work and abilities. From their first meeting, Evans sent forty letters to Combe between 1852 and 1854. However, this friendship and correspondence ended abruptly as a result of Evans's scandalous elopement with a married man, George Henry Lewes, on 20th July 1854. In a letter to Bray dated 15th November 1854, Combe stated that he felt 'deeply mortified and

⁵⁴ Haight, *Letters*, p. 28.

⁵⁵ Haight, *Letters*, p. 33.

⁵⁶ Haight, *Letters*, p. 35.

⁵⁷ Haight, *Letters*, p. 37.

⁵⁸ Haight, *Letters*, p. 48.

distressed' about 'the reports' concerning Evans's flight to Germany. Although Combe appeared to turn his back on Evans, she maintained a belief in phrenological ideas. In an 1856 letter to Bray she wrote: 'I never believed more profoundly than I do now that character is based on organization. I never had a higher appreciation than I have now of the services which phrenology has rendered towards the science of man'.⁵⁹

Phrenologists promoted the idea that women and men have identical brain structures and therefore women have equal numbers of intellectual and 'higher' faculties: Spurzheim argued that 'the intellectual faculties of women resemble those of men'.⁶⁰ Phrenology argued that women were potentially capable of intellectual thought, similar to men, and that it was the strictures of nineteenth-century society that prevented them from 'exercising' their innate faculties. A tribute to Combe in *The English Woman's Journal* (1858) identifies him as a 'Woman's friend'; a 'public man to whom the female sex in particular, owes a large debt of gratitude'.⁶¹ Without Combe, the article argues, 'numbers of [women] might otherwise have come to an untimely end, or vegetated in ill health and nonentity'.⁶² This strongly worded tribute to Combe, his involvement with female education, and the number of strong activist females who became involved with phrenology demonstrate that Combe was perceived at the time to be fighting for the rights of women, especially the right to be given the opportunity to 'exercise' their brain through education and learning.

The sub title of *Middlemarch*, 'A Study of Provincial Life', suggests Evans's aim was to provide an intricate portrayal of everyday life in the nineteenth century. Although its publication date (1874) was after Combe's death (1858), the novel is set between 1830 and 1832, after *The Constitution of Man* (1828), and written when Combe's

⁵⁹ Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography*, p. 188.

⁶⁰ Spurzheim, *Phrenology*, p. 82.

⁶¹ *The English Woman's Journal*, Volume II (London: English Woman's Journal Company, 1859), pp. 54-55.

⁶² *The English Woman's Journal*, p. 56.

phrenological text had gained a widespread readership, selling tens of thousands of copies.⁶³ Many of Evans's readers were undoubtedly aware of Combe's *Constitution*, and the rise, and gradual decline in the 1860s, of phrenological thinking. As Edith Simcox states: the novel is 'a profoundly imaginative psychological study'.⁶⁴ One principle which runs through both *Middlemarch* and phrenology texts is the idea that the brain needs to be kept active, occupied and exercised. In *Constitution*, Combe argues the organic law 'applicable to man, is, that he shall duly exercise his organs, this condition being an indispensable prerequisite of health. The reward of obedience to this law, is enjoyment in the very act of exercising the functions'.⁶⁵ Those who fail to 'exercise' their brain face consequences:

The effects of muscular inactivity will be thereby aggravated: all the functions will, in consequence, become enfeebled; lassitude, uneasiness, anxiety, and a thousand evils, will arise; and life, in short, will become a mere endurance of punishment for infringement of institutions calculated in themselves to promote happiness and afford delight when known and obeyed. This fate frequently overtakes uneducated females, whose early days have been occupied with business or the cares of a family, but whose occupations have ceased before old age has diminished corporeal vigor'.⁶⁶

Evans's protagonist Dorothea can be seen as representing such a woman. Her desire to live an active life and to develop her knowledge cannot be fulfilled because nineteenth-century society enforced passivity and idleness onto women.

In the prelude to *Middlemarch* Evans satirises the dominant view of female incompetence and inferiority:

Some have felt that these blundering lives are due to the inconvenient indefiniteness with which the Supreme Power has fashioned the natures of women: if there were one level of feminine incompetence as strict as the ability to count three and no more, the social lot of women might be treated with scientific certitude. Meanwhile the indefiniteness remains, and the limits of variation are really much wider than anyone would imagine from the sameness

⁶³ Secord, *Visions of Science*, p. 193.

⁶⁴ Edith Simcox, 'Middlemarch' in Gordon Haight *A Century of George Eliot Criticism* (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1966), p. 74.

⁶⁵ George Combe, *The Constitution*, p. 47.

⁶⁶ Combe, *The Constitution*, p. 136.

of women's coiffure and the favourite love-stories in prose and verse.⁶⁷

Evans mocks nineteenth-century attempts to understand women with the idea that a woman's incompetence is vast and varied, and takes so many different forms, that female incompetence is immeasurable and impossible to calculate, even for the exalted ranks of male mathematicians and scientists. The immeasurability of women's incompetence, it seems, is the reason for their enforced inferior status. Perhaps, she implies, if women were not quite so various, a woman's inferiority could be measured and society would be able to distinguish the incompetent women from the competent. Society has termed women's incompetence 'indefinite' to argue that the entire female gender are in need of constant male supervision and direction.

This predominant idea that women were incompetent is present throughout *Middlemarch*. Women are presented as intrinsically inferior to men, with weaker intellectual abilities: 'women were expected to have weak opinions; but the safeguard of society and domestic life was, that opinions were not acted on (p.7). Dorothea's uncle, Mr Brooke, is representative of a patriarchal figure who believes women are inferior and unable to understand intellectually demanding subjects such as politics and classical literature. Although Brooke is described as having an 'impartial mind' who 'felt that women were an inexhaustible subject of study' (p.33), he is a principle character who represents problematic gender codes. In a conversation with Mrs Cadwallader he says that 'your sex are not thinkers' (p.44). According to him, women and politics cannot be considered together: he argues that 'young ladies don't understand political economy, you know' (p.13) and confesses that 'I don't pretend to argue with a lady on politics' (p.44). Furthermore, Brooke places limits upon a woman's learning: 'we must not have you getting too learned for a woman, you know' (p.320). Brooke argues that women are

⁶⁷ George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (London: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 2000), p. 4. All further references will be given in the body of the text.

unable to study certain subjects: 'such deep studies, classics, mathematics, that kind of thing, are too taxing for a woman' (p.53). In addition to categorising certain subjects as unsuitable for women, Brooke argues that women's brains are unable to withstand in depth study of 'female appropriate' subjects: 'there is a lightness about the feminine mind – a touch and go – music, the fine arts, that kind of thing – they should study those up to a certain point, women should; but in a light way, you know' (p.53). His perception of the 'feminine mind' as 'light' is typical of the dominant nineteenth-century conceptions of women's abilities that excluded them from opportunities to stimulate their intellectual faculties. Brooke is one representative of a patriarchal society that promoted the idea that women were incapable of learning to the same standard as men. Women's minds were assumed to be weaker, with limited capacity to understand and discuss the 'deep' topics of 'politics', 'mathematics' and 'classics'. For phrenologists, it was the gendered assumptions that women were intellectually inferior that hindered women's psychological and intellectual development, rather than any innate intellectual or psychological deficiencies. Combe's *Constitution* argues that 'the sources of knowledge are observation and reflection, -experience,- and instruction by books, teachers, and all other means by which the Creator has provided for the improvement of the human mind'.⁶⁸ If we take Brooke's view as representative of patriarchal society, 'instruction by books, teacher' and 'experience' were not considered to be appropriate for women and thus nineteenth-century society limited a woman's intellectual and psychological development.

Mr Brooke's niece, Dorothea, is representative of women whose desires to learn and be active are obstructed by patriarchal nineteenth-century society. Dorothea 'yearned' for a life 'filled with action' (p.71) but her position as a woman makes this impossible. Evans's decision to depict Dorothea as a passionate individual who is

⁶⁸ Combe, *The Constitution*, p. 59.

hindered by nineteenth-century society calls upon patriarchy to re-evaluate their perception of women. Dorothea's passionate nature is undeniable: 'all Dorothea's passion was transfused through a mind struggling towards an ideal life' (p.36). Her mind is 'struggling' largely because of the stricture of nineteenth-century society. The narrative shows how her nature was 'struggling in the bands of narrow teaching, hemmed in by a social life which seemed nothing but a labyrinth of petty courses' (p.23), which, in effect, imprison her. She later reflects that 'of course, my notions of usefulness must be narrow' (p.64) and this shows that she is aware that her 'usefulness' *must* be 'narrow' because of her 'narrow teaching'. This perception of her useful knowledge as limited shows she has the ability to do more. The narrative states that Dorothea 'was disposed rather to accuse the intolerable narrowness and the purblind conscience of the society around her' (p.30). The repeated reference to the 'narrowness' of her society reflects her main obstacle. Dorothea is unable to use her intellectual abilities; her restricted opportunities in nineteenth-century society asks the reader how Dorothea's desires could be fulfilled:

What could she do, what ought she to do? – she, hardly more than a budding woman, but yet with an active conscience and a great mental need, not to be satisfied by a girlish instruction comparable to the nibblings and judgements of a discursive mouse (p.23)

Dorothea's desperate desire to be active leads her to view marriage as the only way to fulfil her need for an active life. Dorothea believes that her hunger for knowledge would be satisfied in marriage because a husband can permit women to learn and assist them in their active duties. The narrative notes how Dorothea 'retained very childlike ideas about marriage [...] the really delightful marriage must be that where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew, if you wished it' (p.8). Furthermore, the narrative states: 'the union which attracted her was one that would deliver her from the girlish subjection of her own ignorance, and give her the freedom of voluntary submission to a guide which would take her along the grandest

path' (p.23). Her wish to be with somebody superior to her is explicit: 'I should wish to have a husband who was above me in judgement and all knowledge [...] a wise man could help me to see which opinions had the best foundation, and would help me to live according to them' (p.33). Dorothea believed that 'provinces of masculine knowledge seemed to [me] a standing-ground from which all truth could be seen more truly' (p.52). Dorothea's primary reason for marrying is her belief that marriage would enable her to expand her knowledge and provide her with a purpose. By marrying a man, Dorothea is allowing patriarchy to lead and supervise her active role, echoing Evans's prelude references to the 'immeasurable incompetence' of women which warranted male supervision and control.

It is Casaubon's wealth of 'higher' knowledge and scholarly experience that attracts Dorothea: 'here was a man who could understand the higher inward life, and with whom there could be some spiritual communion; nay, who could illuminate principle with the widest knowledge' (p.18). The narrator highlights Dorothea's ambition to live a worthy life:

She did not want to deck herself with knowledge – to wear it loose from the nerves and blood that fed her action [...] But something she yearned for by which her life might be filled with action at once rational and ardent; and since the time was gone by for guiding visions and spiritual directors, since prayer heightened yearning but not instruction, what lamp was there but knowledge? Surely learned men kept the only oil; and who more learned than Mr Casaubon? (p.71)

Similarly to the quotations prior to this, the notion that 'men kept the only oil' to the lamp of knowledge shows Dorothea's reasoning for marrying Casaubon. Dorothea's desire for knowledge and the positive impact it can have on a person's life directly links with Combe's *Constitution* which argues that 'knowledge is truly power'.⁶⁹ Dorothea's previous position as an unmarried and uneducated woman effectively rendered her powerless and prevented her from developing her higher mental faculties because she

⁶⁹ Combe, *The Constitution of Man*, p. 8.

had no access to other learning resources. Marriage, according to Dorothea, would provide new opportunities which were inaccessible when unmarried: 'she was going to have room for the energies which stirred uneasily under the dimness and pressure of her own ignorance and the petty peremptoriness of the world's habits' (p.36). The 'energies' of her dormant faculties 'stirred uneasily' because their desires for 'exercise' and stimulation were unfulfilled; echoing ideas of phrenology. Dorothea accepts that the only way she could better her position would be to succumb to nineteenth-century society's belief that women needed constant male supervision and surveillance and therefore sought to marry.

Dorothea's desire to marry Casaubon was based on the widened opportunities marriage would provide, and his wealth of knowledge. Soon after marrying, Dorothea becomes aware of their incompatible nature:

What was fresh to her mind was worn out to his; and such capacity of thought and feeling as had ever been stimulated in him by the general life of mankind had long shrunk to a sort of dried preparation, a lifeless embalmment of knowledge. (p.164).

Casaubon's 'lifeless embalmment of knowledge' starkly contrasts with Dorothea's lively nature. Combe's *Constitution* states: 'one fertile source of unhappiness arises from persons uniting in marriage, whose tempers, talents, and dispositions do not harmonize'.⁷⁰ The 'fertile source of unhappiness' is made evident in one particular passage:

her blooming full-pulsed youth stood there in a moral imprisonment which made itself one with the chill, colourless, narrowed landscape, with the shrunken furniture, the never-red books, and the ghostly stag in a pale fantastic world which seemed to be vanishing from the daylight. (p.227)

In relation to Combe's statement, Dorothea's 'blooming full-pulsed youth' fails to harmonise with the 'shrunken', 'ghostly' environment she shared with Casaubon. The phrase 'moral imprisonment' articulates her dominate hindrance. Dorothea found that

⁷⁰ Combe, *The Constitution*, p.155.

‘the very furniture in the room seemed to have shrunk since she saw it before’ (p.226) and she felt ‘nothing but the dreary oppression’ (p.227). The use of detail enables the reader to see the scene through Dorothea’s eyes, reflecting the shift in Dorothea’s perceptions of married life: beforehand she assumed that marriage would widen opportunities; the reality was that marriage enforced limits upon Dorothea’s opportunities. The narrative states: ‘marriage, which was to bring guidance into worthy and imperative occupation, had not yet freed her from the gentlewoman’s oppressive liberty’ (p.227). The word ‘occupation’ emphasises Dorothea’s desire to be active and stimulated; two conditions she associated with being a wife. The narrative asks the following question: ‘when would the days begin of that active wifely devotion which was to strengthen her husband’s life and exalt her own?’ (p.227). Dorothea’s aim to be Casaubon’s secretary, assistant and devoted wife revolved around gaining a sense of purpose, to assist Casaubon in all of his duties. The phrase ‘active wifely duty’ relates to Dorothea’s need for a purposeful role, albeit a subordinate one.

In contrast to Dorothea being restricted by gender restrictions and stereotypes, the male characters, specifically Casaubon and Dr Lydgate, are portrayed as ‘active’, arguably as a result of their privileged, male position in society and the opportunities to ‘exercise’ their intellectual faculties that went with it. In Casaubon and Dorothea, Evans provides the reader with two opposites, each defined by their gender, and each illustrating the potential perils that attended stereotypical gender roles in the nineteenth century. Dorothea’s situation exposed how being a married woman could be just as oppressive as being an unmarried woman. In contrast, although Casaubon is free to take on extensive, stimulating literary work, it is this which leads to a deterioration in his health and is later the prime factor of his death. Casaubon’s doctor, Lydgate, advises Casaubon to engage in a variety of balancing mental activities in order to prevent overexertion of his intellectual part. Lydgate, following the ideas of Combe, prescribes

the use and stimulation of *all* faculties – animal, moral and intellectual – so that Casaubon may regain a mental balance. Lydgate's diagnosis is that 'the source of the illness was the common error of intellectual men – a too eager and monotonous application: the remedy was, to be satisfied with moderate work, and to seek variety of relaxation' (p.237). A variety of 'exercise' to stimulate different parts of the mind is suggested: 'the only course is to try by all means, direct and indirect, to moderate and vary his occupations' (p.239). Combe's *Constitution* reflects upon individuals who failed to vary their 'exercise'. For Combe, over exercise of the intellectual faculties had consequences like the overexertion of the animal faculties: men who pursued 'ambition in the senate or the field, in literature of philosophy', could 'even in their most brilliant moments of external prosperity', suffer from 'the canker' which 'was gnawing within' and consequently suffer a 'mingled tumult of inferior propensities and intellect, carrying with it an habitual feeling of unsatisfied desires'.⁷¹ As Combe states: 'all [faculties] are liable to abuse. Their operations are right only when they act in harmony with each other'.⁷²

Lydgate, too, is presented as an active male character. The narrative states: he 'was not an ill-tempered man; his intellectual activity, the ardent kindness of his heart, as well as his strong frame, would always, under tolerably easy conditions, have kept him above the petty uncontrolled susceptibilities which make bad temper' (p.532). The phrase 'intellectual activity' directly connects with Combe's phrenological language. As a man, Lydgate has the freedom to keep his mind active and exercised, and abides by Combe's organic law that 'all our faculties shall be duly exercised'.⁷³

Another character who uses phrenological language is Mr Featherstone.

Featherstone refers to having one's 'faculties', moments before his death. To Mary

⁷¹ Combe, *The Constitution*, p. 234.

⁷² Combe, *The Constitution*, p. 58.

⁷³ Combe, *The Constitution*, p. 127.

Garth he says: 'you hearken, Missy. It's three o'clock' in the morning, and I've got all my faculties as well as ever I had in my life. [...] Do you hear, Missy? I've got my faculties' (p.262). Featherstone's repeated insistence of having his faculties refers to the phrenological framework. In order to convince Mary to listen to his instructions concerning the will, Featherstone attempts to prove his sanity and rational thinking by asserting his ownership of his faculties. Faculties are valuable possessions to Featherstone. Raffles also refers to 'faculties'. He states: 'I've got my faculties as if I was in my prime' (p.438). Like Featherstone, Raffles is presenting himself as mentally stable by alluding to having his faculties at the best state possible.

While phrenological language and principles are abundant in *Middlemarch*, Evans's complex representation of the mind suggests that the principles of phrenology alone were too simplistic for her characterisation. Throughout *Middlemarch*, minds are referred to as webs or labyrinths. One quotation in particular articulates this image: 'the web itself is made of spontaneous beliefs and indefinable joys, yearnings of one life to another, visions of completeness, indefinite trust' (p.285). This web image adds complexity to the relatively simple key phrenological belief that the brain is carefully structured and has separated areas representing specific faculties. However, Evans's quotation that 'character is based on organization' alludes to the phrenological structure that character is made up of independent parts.⁷⁴ It can be argued that Evans's idea that 'our passions do not live apart in locked chambers, but, dressed in their small wardrobe of notions, bring their provisions to a common table and mess together, feeding out of the common store according to their appetite' (p.138) relates to the daily mental battle Combe focuses on in his phrenological texts. In his *Elements of Phrenology* he argues that 'man is confessedly an assemblage of contradictions'.⁷⁵ Although it could be

⁷⁴ Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography*, p. 188.

⁷⁵ George Combe, *Elements of Phrenology*, Third Edition (Edinburgh: John Anderson, 1828), p. 60.

argued that phrenology promoted the idea that each faculty remained within its allocated cerebral part, Combe argues that those individuals who do not achieve harmony have the different desires from each faculty mingle together in tumult which consequently causes mental unrest.

These instances show how phrenology influenced Evans's writing of *Middlemarch*. The frequency with which the words and phrases of phrenology are included in speech and narrative, suggests, to me, that Evans's readers were expected, by the author, to be aware of the philosophy to which she was alluding.

Chapter two

The phrenological gaze in *The Professor* and *Villette*

Laura Mulvey coined the phrase ‘the male gaze’ in 1975 to describe the subjection of women by men in visual arts; specifically in film, advertisements and paintings.⁷⁶ She argues that ‘in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly’.⁷⁷ Mulvey’s phrase is relatable to nineteenth-century society: John Tosh argues that Victorian advice books ‘left no doubt that the husband should be master’ and this hierarchical structure in nineteenth-century domesticity parallels Mulvey’s gender codes.⁷⁸ The strict distinctions made between gender enabled society to prescribe concrete gendered practices aligning with the active/male and passive/women.

This chapter combines Mulvey’s male gaze with phrenology, to explore the phrenological gaze. The phrenological gaze is used in Charlotte Brontë’s *The Professor* (1857) and *Villette* (1853): both works coincided with the establishment of phrenology as a popular ‘science’ and Combe’s bestselling *Constitution*; and it seems clear that many readers of the time were aware of the discourse of phrenology. The plots for both novels are remarkably similar: both protagonists leave England and travel to Brussels; become teachers; and possess knowledge of phrenology. A fundamental difference is their gender. This will remain at the forefront of this chapter to explore how the application of phrenological theory differed for both men and women. To begin, this chapter establishes a foundation for my phrenological analysis of Brontë’s fiction by

⁷⁶ Robert Arp, *1001 Ideas That Changed the Way We Think* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013), p. 856.

⁷⁷ Arp, *10001 Ideas*, p. 856.

⁷⁸ John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2008), p. 28.

demonstrating her interest in phrenology.

In 1847, George Henry Lewes sent Charlotte Brontë his criticism of *Jane Eyre* (1847): he warned her to ‘beware of Melodrama’ and ‘to adhere to the real’.⁷⁹ On the 6th November 1847, Brontë responded thus:

You warn me to beware of melodrama, and you exhort me to adhere to the real [...] Imagination is a strong, restless faculty, which claims to be heard and exercised: are we to be quite deaf to her cry, and insensate to her struggles? When she shows us bright pictures, are we never to look at them and try to reproduce them? And when she is eloquent, and speaks rapidly and urgently in our ear, are we not to write to her dictation?⁸⁰

Brontë found it impossible to ignore the ‘cry’ of her faculty of imagination; it provided her with ‘bright pictures’ and spoke with a sense of urgency. The repetition of ‘she’ and ‘her’ shows Brontë’s gendered assumption that the faculty is a woman. In doing so, Brontë is identifying one particular skill as feminine: the opposite of imagination is science, which, in the nineteenth century, was considered to be the height of intellectual endeavour and a strictly masculine practice. Brontë uses the binary oppositions of gender to argue imagination was a feminine characteristic and that, in her case at least, the engagement of her imaginative faculty is a spirit raising tonic. In reference to writing *Shirley* (1849) she wrote to W. S. Williams:

The faculty of imagination lifted me when I was sinking three months ago, its active exercise has kept my head above water since – its results cheer me now – for I feel they have enabled me to give pleasure to others – I am thankful to God who gave me the faculty.⁸¹

Brontë reference to the ‘active exercise’ of her imaginative faculty echoes a fundamental law of Combe’s *Constitution*: ‘the best mode of increasing the strength and energy of any organ and function, is to exercise them’.⁸² Combe states that ‘the reward

⁷⁹ Heather Glen (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Brontë’s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 110.

⁸⁰ Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1862), pp. 34-35.

⁸¹ Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, pp. 99-100.

⁸² Combe, *The Constitution*, p. 132.

of obedience to this law, is enjoyment in the very act of exercising the functions'.⁸³

Brontë's statement that 'its results cheer me now' seems to support this. Brontë discusses phrenology with both owners of her publishers Elder, Smith & Co.: their shared interest of phrenology demonstrates a belief in the creditability of phrenology and the publisher's approval of phrenological influence in her fiction. George Smith in particular appears to have a great interest in the philosophy of phrenology: in June 1851 Brontë and Smith travelled to London together to see the phrenologist J. P. Browne and have their heads phrenologically examined.⁸⁴ Brontë wrote to Smith to exclaim that 'I wanted a portrait, and have now got one very much to my mind [...] it is a sort of miracle'.⁸⁵ Her desire to own this 'portrait' is explicit: 'I am glad I have got it. I wanted it'.⁸⁶ Brontë's eagerness to have her head phrenologically examined demonstrates her belief in the creditability of reading heads to decode an individual's character. Elizabeth Gaskell's renowned biography of Brontë does not feature the word 'phrenology' but Gaskell uses phrenological language frequently and this suggests that contemporary readers would have been aware of the ideas being discussed, without needing an explicit reference. The word 'faculty' had its own context, bounded within phrenology. In reference to Brontë's decision to become a governess, Gaskell states: 'to Charlotte Brontë it was a perpetual attempt to force all her faculties into a direction for which the whole of her previous life had unfitted them'.⁸⁷ Gaskell's use of phrenological language and reference to faculties demonstrates her own belief in the phrenological framework.

On 7th August 1841, Brontë exclaimed:

Such a strong wish for wings – wings such as wealth can furnish; such an urgent thirst to see, to know, to learn; something internal seemed to expand bodily for a minute. I was tantalised by the consciousness of faculties unexercised, - then all

⁸³ Combe, *The Constitution*, p. 47

⁸⁴ See Appendix 1.

⁸⁵ Margaret Smith (ed.), *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë* Volume Two 1848-1851 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 657.

⁸⁶ Smith, *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, p. 657.

⁸⁷ Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, p. 183.

collapsed, and I despaired.⁸⁸

Her ardent nature to grow and have the freedom to learn is linked to a bodily reaction. This relationship between the mental and physical is a key phrenological belief which argues that the mental ‘exercise’ of faculties causes a physical growth. Brontë was ‘tantalised’ by ‘the ‘consciousness of faculties unexercised’: her wish for ‘wings’ demonstrates her need to escape the restraints of her position within nineteenth-century society. She wishes to escape so she can ‘learn’ and ‘see’.

Brontë fictionalises the idea that women were unable to fulfil their desires to develop certain phrenological faculties in many of her works of fiction. Although Brontë is obviously aware of phrenological laws, she is restricted; this suggests that while phrenology offered hope and established the presence of intellectual qualities in women, nineteenth-century society severely restricted their psychological development. This idea is present in Brontë’s works: Lucy Snowe’s position in nineteenth-century society in *Villette* differs from *The Professor*’s protagonist William Crimsworth predominantly because of their gender. Both protagonists are familiar with the theories of phrenology and subject other characters to their phrenological gaze.

Sally Shuttleworth argues that ‘phrenology necessitated the acquisition of a special body of knowledge in order to interpret skull formation. Taken singly, the individual contours of each cranial organ [...] held no meaning, their significance lay entirely in the observer’s interpretation’.⁸⁹ William prides himself on having this ‘special body of knowledge’; using it to gain power and assert his superiority. In order to present his superior position to the reader, William draws attention to individuals who do not have knowledge of phrenology:

I thought [Edward] was trying to read my character, but I felt as secure against his scrutiny as if I had had on a casque with the visor down [...] He might see

⁸⁸ Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*, p. 190.

⁸⁹ Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë*, p. 61.

lines and trace characters, but he could make nothing of them. My nature was not his name, and its signs were to him like the words of an unknown tongue.⁹⁰

William feels 'secure' against Edward's gaze; believing that Edward would be unable to expose William's weaknesses. According to phrenologists, phrenology was significantly different from physiognomy: anybody could look at a person's head but only those with knowledge of phrenology could interpret its form.⁹¹ William continually refers to his own superiority: 'I knew all that [Edward] knew, and, what was worse, he suspected that I kept the padlock of silence on mental wealth in which he was no sharer' (p.21). This reference to owing 'the padlock of silence on mental wealth' relates to the philosophy of phrenology. William celebrates his knowledge of phrenology and depicts it as an expertise possessed by a privileged few. William is the only character in *The Professor* who has knowledge of phrenology and therefore is able to use it to subject others to his phrenological gaze, without being subject to it himself.

In *Villette*, Lucy Snowe is unable to perceive herself as superior, because not only is she a woman, but she is not the only character who possesses knowledge of phrenology, and she is therefore subject to the (male) phrenological gaze herself. Upon her arrival in Brussels she is subjected to a phrenological examination which determines the start of her employment. For Madame Beck, the headmistress of the school, a phrenological reading of Lucy is of vital importance and consequently summons fellow teacher M. Paul to read her:

"Mon cousin," began madame, "I want your opinion. We know your skill in physiognomy; use it now. Read that countenance."

The little man fixed on me his spectacles. A resolute compression of the lips, and gathering of the brow, seemed to say that he meant to see through me, and that a veil would be no veil for him.

"I read it", he pronounced.

"And what do you have to say about it?"

"Well – many things," was the oracular answer.

⁹⁰ Charlotte Brontë, *The Professor* (London: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1994), p. 14.

⁹¹ Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë*, p. 61.

“Bad or good?”

“Of each kind, without doubt,” pursued the diviner.

[...] Still he scrutinized. The judgement, when it came at last, was as indefinite as what had gone before it.

“Engage her. If good predominates in that nature, the action will bring its own reward”.⁹²

Lucy argues that ‘a veil would be no veil for him’: a phrenologist’s power to impose their gaze is depicted as absolute, with the subject unable to escape it. Beck presents Paul’s skill as vitally important; her desire to have Lucy’s phrenological framework exposed shows her belief in the creditability and validity of phrenological analyses. Paul’s findings are ambiguous: he confirms that Lucy’s head decodes ‘bad’ and ‘good’ elements. While William is exempted from a phrenological analysis, Lucy is placed under subject to a man’s gaze and although her position mirrors William’s in occupation and location, she is usurped by M. Paul who, as a man *with* phrenological knowledge, overrides her.

Lucy’s position as a woman in nineteenth-century society opposes the philosophy of phrenology: the active/male - passive/female assumption hinders women from abiding by the key phrenological principle that individuals can only grow and develop through the ‘exercise’ of their faculties and by seeking varied stimuli to engage and access all of the faculties. These two opposing principles impact Lucy’s desires: Lucy’s longings fluctuate, swaying from conforming to nineteenth-century society gender roles to abiding by the phrenological laws to develop her faculties. Lucy’s need for change, to seek new experiences and activity is obvious: ‘it seemed I must be stimulated into action. I must be goaded, driven, stung, forced to energy [...] my small adopted duty must be snatched from my easily contented conscience’ (p.38). This need for action is as a result of Lucy’s confined experiences as a carer just prior to this. Lucy

⁹² Charlotte Brontë, *Villette* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 67. All further references will be given in the body of the text.

is aware that monotony and confinement hindered her potential for growth; echoing ideas of phrenology. From the beginning of her trip to Brussels, Lucy viewed her travelling as vital for 'exercising' the idle parts of her mind: 'I regarded it as a brief holiday, permitted for once to work-weary faculties, rather than as an adventure of life and death' (p.45). For Lucy it is essential, rather than an 'adventure', to 'exercise' certain faculties. This decision to 'exercise' them is not comparable to an 'adventure of life and death'; suggesting it is an ordinary action. Lucy believes that a move to a more stimulating environment is necessary for her to be able to cultivate certain faculties: 'I like the spirit of this great London which I feel around me. Who but a coward would pass his whole life in hamlets, and for ever abandon his faculties to the eating rust of obscurity?' (p.48). Lucy sees that the 'exercise' of faculties is a top priority: 'peril, loneliness, an uncertain future, are not oppressive evils, so long as the frame is healthy and the faculties are employed' (p.56). This idea suggests that stimulation of faculties enables individuals to combat potential 'oppressive evils' such as 'loneliness' and an 'uncertain future' and that developed faculties can function as shields. Lucy's decision to leave England was influenced by her need to stimulate her idle faculties; phrenology gave women hope for more interesting and empowered lives by arguing that women were endowed with intellectual faculties, much the same as men, and that it was possible to engage and develop their intrinsic strengths.

It is apparent that Lucy's position as a teacher and student enables her to live the active life she sought. Her description of her life at Beck's school portrays it as a positive environment, for herself and the female pupils. Lucy's knowledge of phrenological language and ideas is shown as she focuses upon the 'exercise' and variety offered. Lucy notes how 'no minds were overtasked; the lessons were well distributed and made incomparably easy to the learner; there was a liberty of amusement, and a provision for exercise which kept the girls healthy' (p.73). The

connection between 'the provision of exercise' and good health highlights the key phrenological belief that an active mind leads to a healthy state. Lucy comments on the pupils: 'here was a great houseful of lively girls, all well-dressed and many of them handsome, gaining knowledge by a marvellously easy method, without painful exertion or useless waste of spirits' (p.75). Arguably, Lucy hints at the limits placed upon a female's education by highlighting how there was no 'painful exertion'. The environment of Brussels is depicted as utterly different to that of England: 'here, in short, was a foreign school; of which the life, movement, and variety made it a complete and most charming contrast to many English institutions of the same kind' (p.75). The reference to 'variety' points to another key phrenological belief that a range of mental exercise is vital. Lucy's active life causes her faculties to develop:

My time was now well and profitably filled up. What with teaching others and studying closely myself, I had hardly a spare moment. It was pleasant. I felt I was getting on; not lying the stagnant prey of mould and rust, but polishing my faculties and whetting them to a keen edge with constant use. (p.82)

The phrase 'whetting them to a keen edge with constant use' reflects a phrenological aim to enlarge the faculty to its full capacity, causing it to swell to its edge. This Lucy, the one which seeks stimulation and new opportunities, can be seen as representing the hope phrenology gave to women.

Opposing Lucy's passionate nature for stimulation and mental 'exercise' is Lucy's desire to conform to the passive/female position. She believes she is inferior which makes her feel inadequate and incapable of developing certain faculties. Lucy presents her character as conforming to the gender roles given to women: 'I know not that I was of a self-reliant or active nature' (p.36). Her opinion that she was dependent on others, with a passive nature aligns with the passive/female assumption. Furthermore, she claims that 'I never had a head for science' (p.36). The use of the word 'head' instead of mind or brain is a direct reference to the key phrenological belief that a

person's head decoded a person's weak faculties. Lucy believes that certain faculties which may present her as an 'active' person do not suit her passive character:

A keen relish for dramatic expression had revealed itself as part of my nature; to cherish and exercise this new-found faculty might gift me with a world of delight, but it would not do for a mere looker-on at life: the strength and longing must be put by; and I put them by, and fastened them in with the lock of a resolution which neither Time nor Temptation has since picked (p.141)

Lucy's perception of herself as a 'looker-on at life' causes her to suppress her interest for dramatic expression. Although she feels a 'longing' to develop this faculty, it contradicts her position as a passive woman and therefore feels unable to pursue this. This part of Lucy's character directly opposes her attitudes explored previously; highlighting the inability for women to apply phrenological principles without contradicting their given position in nineteenth-century society.

While Lucy's decision to become a teacher is based upon her desire to become active, William views his position as a teacher as an opportunity to assert his power. In reference to the youth of Brabant he states the following:

It needed a certain degree of tact to adopt one's measures to their capacity. Their intellectual faculties were generally weak, their animal propensities strong; thus there was at once an impotence and a kind of inert force in their natures [...] having short memories, dense intelligence, feeble reflective powers, they recoiled with repugnance from any occupation that demanded close study or deep thought' (p.48)

Again William draws attention to his 'special body of knowledge'.⁹³ According to William, his pupils have a weak phrenological framework as the animal propensities outweigh the intellectual faculties. He continually strives to impose his phrenological gaze and opinions on others, and having examined the male pupils, he pursues the female pupils at the neighbouring school. To begin with, the girls' school is a complete mystery to William: when learning his boarded up window looked onto the girls school

⁹³ Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë*, p. 61.

he becomes consumed with gaining access: 'the first thing I did was to scrutinise closely the nailed boards, hoping to find some chink or crevice which I might enlarge, and so get a peep at the consecrated ground' (p.47). William presents himself as a voyeur, casting his gaze upon unknowing subjects: 'so amusing to have [...] studied female character in a variety of phases, myself the while sheltered from view by a modest muslin curtain' (p.47). His desire becomes desperate: 'not only then, but many a time after, especially in moments of weariness and low spirits, did I look with dissatisfied eyes on that tantalising board, longing to tear it away and get a glimpse' (p.47). The words 'tantalising' and 'longing' add a sexual tone to his thought processes; linking the desire to see to the desire to touch. When he later takes a position at the girls' school, and access to the girls' garden is permitted, it appears it is his lack of experience in working with women which is so intriguing for William:

To teach young ladies would be an occupation so interesting; to be admitted at all into a ladies' boarding-school would be an incident so new in my life. Besides, thought I, as I glanced at the boarded window, 'I shall at last see the mysterious garden. I shall gaze both on the angels and their Eden' (p.55).

William's phrase 'I shall gaze' reflects his desire to prey upon the female students.

Furthermore, his analogy of the garden to Eden casts the female pupils as representatives of Eve, the religious symbol of the temptress who is depicted as rebellious, easily fooled, and desirous of knowledge, and who tempts men to disobey the law of God. This prejudgement made by William's views about the female pupils reflect the dominant ideas about young women of the nineteenth century: delicate innocents in need of and soliciting male protection. When such attention was declared unwelcome, it was not unusual for the fragile angel to be suddenly declared the vile temptress. This demonstrates his assumption that they must be inferior and shifts responsibility of his predatory nature onto the victims.

For William, the classroom is a prime setting to exert his penetrative gaze upon

his female pupils; he maintains the power to observe and subjects each pupil to his phrenological gaze:

Well, when I looked along the row of young heads, my eye generally stopped at this of Adèle's [...] sullen ill-temper were on her forehead, vicious propensities in her eye [...] her massive shape looked as if it could not bend much, nor did her large head – so broad at the base, so narrow towards the top (p.72).

William's gaze is focussed upon 'the row of young heads', demonstrating his use of phrenology to make judgements based on their head formation. The focus on Adèle's forehead, the shape of her head, with particular attention given to the base and top, demonstrates William's phrenological outlook. William subjects other pupils to his gaze and one specific analysis demonstrates William's familiarity with phrenological texts:

I wonder that anyone, looking at that girl's head and countenance, would have received her under their roof. She had precisely the same shape of skull as Pope Alexander the Sixth. Her organs of benevolence, veneration, conscientiousness, adhesiveness, were singularly small; those of self-esteem, firmness, destructiveness, combativeness, preposterously large. Her head sloped up in the penthouse shape, was contracted about the forehead, and prominent behind [...] narrow as was her brow it presented space enough for the legible graving of two words, Mutiny and Hate. (p.73)

Compare William's phrenological analysis of Trista with a passage from Combe's

Constitution, which presents Spurzheim's phrenological reading of Pope Alexander VI:

This cerebral organization [...] is despicable in the eyes of a phrenologist. The animal organs compose by far its greatest portion. Such a brain is no more adequate to the manifestation of Christian virtues, than the brain of an idiot from birth [...]. The sincipital (or coronal) region is exceedingly low, particularly at the organs of Benevolence, Veneration, and Conscientiousness. Such a head is unfit for any employment of a superior kind.⁹⁴

The clear similarities of both phrenological readings strongly suggests that William has read Spurzheim's phrenological analysis. Brontë's decision to include this also shows that Brontë read phrenological texts. When comparing both passages it is apparent William shifts Spurzheim's analysis directly onto a pupil, William comments upon the

⁹⁴ Combe, *The Constitution*, pp. 159-160.

same faculties as Spurzheim: benevolence, veneration and conscientiousness. The only difference between these two analyses is the gender of the subject; William's decision to shift a condemning judgement onto a woman demonstrates his attempt to portray women as inferior, a status which he believes is indicated by a weaker phrenological framework.

Like William, Lucy uses her knowledge of phrenology to make comments on other characters in the novel. Her 'gaze', however, is female and therefore comes from an assumed position of inferiority. The female phrenological gaze, at least in Lucy's case, seems to be looking up at men while looking down at women. Combe et al. promoted theories that suggested an equality of given faculties across the sexes, and yet Lucy, influenced by her nineteenth-century environment uses phrenology to decode the formations of skulls and confirm the men around her as superior to the women. For example, Lucy uses phrenology to assess Madame Beck:

Her face offered contrast: its features were by no means such as are usually seen in conjunction with a complexion of such blended freshness and repose: their outline was stern; her forehead was high but narrow; it expressed capacity and some benevolence, but no expanse (p.72)

Lucy's phrenological analysis of Ginevra Fanshawe is not as balanced:

Most of her other faculties seemed to be in the same flimsy condition: her liking and disliking, her love and hate, were mere cobweb and gossamer; but she had one thing about her that seemed strong and durable enough, and that was – her selfishness. (p.85)

The 'flimsy' condition of Ginevra's faculties contrasts with Lucy's description of her own when she was 'whetting them to a keen edge with constant use' (p.82). The use of the word 'flimsy' suggests Ginevra's faculties as fragile and weak. The only characteristic Lucy was certain of was Ginevra's selfishness; this strong assertive opinion shows Lucy has at least some positive regard for her own thoughts and faculties when expressed internally, but little for the women around her.

Lucy's phrenological reading of Graham Bretton and his mother further indicates gendered bias: in relation to Graham, Lucy comments that 'his mother possessed a good development of benevolence, but he owned a better and larger' (p.197). As established previously, a large physical size reflected a wider capacity to be developed. Not only was Graham's 'larger', it was 'better'; indicating Graham had a better development of benevolence. M. Paul is also subjected to Lucy's phrenological reading:

Nor could I be blind to certain vigorous characteristics of his physiognomy; rendered conspicuous now by the contrast with a throng of tamer faces: the deep intent keenness of his eye, the power of his forehead – pale, broad, and full (p.220)

By describing Paul's forehead as 'broad' and 'full', Lucy is providing the reader with a positive impression of Paul. Unlike Madame Beck's forehead, which was 'high but narrow', Paul's is 'full' which suggests he has developed his intellectual faculties to their fullest capacity. Lucy's attraction to Paul's strengths are revealed further on: 'now, penetrated with his influence, and living by his affection, having his worth by intellect, and his goodness by heart – I preferred him before all humanity' (p.492). However, Paul leaves for three years and this gives Lucy the freedom to grow and to achieve things that may not have been possible under Paul's watchful gaze. She teaches pupils, earns money and even buys additional property and calls this period 'the three happiest years of my life' (pp.491-494). Lucy does not, however, regard these achievements and her happiness as products of her own making: 'the secret of my success did not lie so much in myself, in any endowment, any power of mine, as in a new state of circumstances, a wonderfully changed life, a relieved heart' (p.494). Lucy is successful and has agency, even if she is not aware of it, but the ending of the novel is ambiguous. It is unclear whether Paul will return or whether he has been drowned in a storm and therefore Lucy's fate is left unclear too.

William's romantic interests are also influenced by phrenology. William's attraction to Frances Evans Henri stemmed from his phrenological analysis which indicated a good phrenological structure, with capacity to develop. Although Henri is subjected to his gaze, like her fellow pupils, she is praised for having 'different' phrenological attributes:

The shape of her head too was different – the superior part more developed, the base considerably less [...] A careworn character of forehead and a corresponding moulding of the mouth struck me with a sentiment resembling surprise, but these traits would probably have passed unnoticed by any less crotchety observer (pp.89-90).

William focuses his gaze on the key areas: 'the superior part' of the forehead which signifies her intellectual abilities and the back of the head which indicates the size of the animal propensities: 'the base considerably less'. Arguably as a result of her promising phrenological framework, William assigns himself the position of her tutor and master. William's relationship with Henri makes her his prime subject to test, what he calls, 'the benefits of my system' (p.109). William assumes sole responsibility for Henri's development:

To speak truth, I watched this change much as a gardener watches the growth of a precious plant, and I contributed to it too, even as the said gardener contributes to the development of his favourite. To me it was not difficult to discover how I could best foster my pupil, cherish her starved feelings, and induce the outward manifestation of that inward vigour which sunless drought and blighting blast had hitherto forbidden to expand. (p.109)

William's notion that his impact on Henri's development equals the sun's effect on a plant shows his deluded outlook concerning his significance. Although William's feelings towards Henri develop, he ensures a hierarchical structure of their relationship remains: 'we met as we had always met, as master and pupil [...] Frances, observant and serviceable' (p.161). The 'master and pupil' relationship enforces his superior position and Henri's acceptance of her inferior position enforces the binary opposites of active/male and passive/female. The use of the word 'master' reflects the nineteenth-

century advice books mentioned previously which 'left no doubt that the husband should be master'.⁹⁵ William's possessive nature is exposed during his proposal to Henri: 'relinquish your labours – you must be weary – and let me have the happiness of giving you rest' (p.167). William's wish for Henri to spend the rest of her life in 'rest' contradicts his previously stated desire to help her develop her intellectual faculties. He contradicts this wish, however, and believes her strong intellectual abilities need to be kept active: 'strong faculties stirred in her frame, and they demanded full nourishment, free exercise. Mine was not the hand ever to starve or cramp them; no, I delighted in offering them sustenance, and in clearing them wider space for action' (p.183). William appears confused about what he wants Henri to do; while he supports her development and recognises her need to 'exercise' and engage her faculties, he also appears conscious of the need to assume superiority over her. These contradictions mirror Lucy's position in nineteenth-century society; while phrenology helped to support a woman's intellectual abilities, the male gender must be considered as 'master' and therefore both protagonists are depicted as products of nineteenth-century society.

Brontë narrates *Villette* and *The Professor* through a phrenological gaze. Women who attempted to abide by phrenological laws fought against nineteenth-century society's enforcement of active/male - passive/female. Lucy is representative of women who were at the centre of these two opposing principles. Both protagonists are depicted as products of their society; while William acknowledges Henri's strong phrenological framework and wishes to aid her development, he is aware that his position as a man entitles him to a 'master' status. All of Lucy's phrenological analyses depict men positively and women negatively. Lucy and William are undoubtedly influenced by phrenology and nineteenth-century prescribed gender roles: both philosophies could not be fulfilled without hindering the other.

⁹⁵ Tosh, *A Man's Place*, p. 28.

Chapter three

Phrenology and women's madness

The first two chapters demonstrated the influence of phrenology in nineteenth-century fiction: both Evans and Brontë fictionalised the idea that women were unable to abide by the phrenology laws without contradicting their subordinate position in society. While phrenology supported women to seek opportunities to strengthen their intellectual faculties, nineteenth-century society's enforcement of passivity obstructed their attempts to do so. This final chapter uses texts, again written by women, which depict the realities of life for women in the nineteenth century: Florence Nightingale's essay 'Cassandra' (1852) focuses on the restrictions placed on women by nineteenth-century society and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story 'The Yellow Wallpaper' (1892), is based on her personal experience of 'rest cure' will be discussed in relation to phrenology. The key phrenological text used in this chapter is Dr Andrew Combe's *Observations on Mental Derangement* (1831). Andrew was George Combe's younger brother, and was described as George's 'closest confidant and key ally in the phrenological struggles'.⁹⁶ While George's books sold by the tens of thousands and were hugely popular with the general public, Cooter argues that Andrew's *Observations* was more influential in the academic and medical worlds and had 'a decisive impact on British psychiatric thought'.⁹⁷ This chapter focuses on the themes shared by Nightingale, Gilman and Andrew Combe to demonstrate that influential men *and* women of the time shared key principles concerning women's inability to grow intellectual and develop naturally when conforming to the passive/female ideal. To establish a context for my argument, this chapter begins by showing that Nightingale and Gilman were aware of phrenology and that phrenological principles influenced the

⁹⁶ Stack, *Queen Victoria's Skull*, p. 54.

⁹⁷ Roger Cooter, 'Phrenology and British Alienists, c. 1825-1845' Part I: Converts to a Doctrine, p. 8.

ways in which both women perceived brain activity and development.

On the 12th October circa 1847, Florence Nightingale wrote: ‘I read the phrenological journal with the greatest interest, and should, if we had remained longer, have ventured to borrow the first volume, which is, I believe a *very* good one’.⁹⁸ Nightingale’s decision to read the phrenological journal demonstrates her active interest in expanding her knowledge of phrenology. In addition, Nightingale’s frequent correspondence with Dr Richard Fowler centred on phrenology. On the 24th December 1847, Nightingale wrote to Fowler to provide detailed descriptions of the busts in the Capitoline Museum, Nightingale analyses the Greek Head:

The part of the forehead immediately above the *eyebrows* is very prominent [...] Scipio Africanus has exceeding prominence in that part of the forehead just *above* the perceptive organs, in that place where phrenologists place comparison and causality. It is impossible to pass his head without being struck by it, as well as by the great size of the intellectual faculties.⁹⁹

Nightingale’s focus on the forehead demonstrates her knowledge of the key focal points examined during phrenological analyses. Her reference to the specific organs of ‘comparison’ and ‘causality’ reflects an in depth awareness of the phrenological structure, including the location of the intellectual faculties. Furthermore, Nightingale is ‘struck by’ the strong phrenological framework, demonstrating that she believed in the idea that the physical structure of the skull indicates a person’s strengths and weaknesses. In addition to sending Fowler phrenological analyses, she used phrenological ideas to express her need for mental stimulation. In an undated note (c. 1851), Nightingale yearns for an active life: ‘a profession, a trade, a necessary occupation, something to fill & employ all my faculties, I have always felt essential to me, I have always longed for, consciously or not’.¹⁰⁰ As established previously, the word

⁹⁸ Florence Nightingale, *Florence Nightingale on Society and Politics, Philosophy, Science, Education and Literature* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 2003), p. 653.

⁹⁹ Lyn McDonald (ed.), *Collected Works of Florence Nightingale* Volume 7 (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier Univ. Press, 2006), p. 167.

¹⁰⁰ Florence Nightingale, *Ever Yours, Florence Nightingale: Selected Letters* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 47.

‘faculties’ was bounded within the context of phrenology. This desperate desire to ‘employ’ her mind parallels the focus of her essay ‘Cassandra’: Nightingale argues that nineteenth-century society failed to incorporate a woman's need for mental stimulation by confining women in the domestic space. Her essay, *Notes from Devotional Authors of the Middle Ages* (1873-1874), references Dr Andrew Combe.¹⁰¹ This provides evidence that she read his texts and importantly, credited his views.

Gilman was also aware of phrenology: in one diary entry she refers to phrenological readings as ‘very satisfactory’.¹⁰² Furthermore, in her autobiography she uses phrenological principles and language associated with phrenology to describe how her mind functions. Gilman argues: ‘a brain may lose some faculties and keep others; it may be potent for a little while and impotent the rest of the time’.¹⁰³ Again, Gilman’s use of the word ‘faculties’ relates to the phrenology discourse. Furthermore, she argues that possessing faculties is dependent on engaging the independent organs, aligning with George Combe’s argument that ‘exercise’ of faculties allowed the organs to function and develop. In referring to her own phrenological development she argues that ‘the natural faculties are there, as my books and lectures show’.¹⁰⁴ For Gilman, her ability to produce written works demonstrates that she possesses particular faculties. By identifying these as ‘natural’ Gilman reflects the idea that these faculties are innate, present from birth, echoing ideas of phrenology and contradicting the dominant nineteenth-century notion of women lacking intellectual abilities, as with many others, from birth. Referring to her ‘dream world’ at the age of thirteen, Gilman recalls that ‘it was by far the largest, most active part of my mind’.¹⁰⁵ Gilman is reflecting on the

¹⁰¹ Nightingale, *Florence Nightingale on Mysticism*, p. 20.

¹⁰² Catherine Golden, Joanna S. Zangrando (eds.), *The Mixed Legacy of Charlotte Perkins Gilman* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2000), p. 60.

¹⁰³ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography* (New York: Arno Press, 1972), p. 98.

¹⁰⁴ Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, p. 100.

¹⁰⁵ Gilman, *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, p. 23.

correlation between physical size and activity; a key phrenological belief which asserted that stimulation of a particular organ will cause the organ to swell in size.

In May 1887, Gilman began a 'rest cure' treatment under the care of Doctor Silas Weir Mitchell. Horowitz describes Mitchell's 'rest cure' as a 'reversion to infancy' which 'involved extreme rest [...] total seclusion'.¹⁰⁶ Mitchell believed that '[women are] physiologically other than the man'.¹⁰⁷ This view directly opposes Gilman's own beliefs: 'there is no female mind. The brain is not an organ of sex. As well speak of a female liver'.¹⁰⁸ By establishing Gilman's awareness of phrenology, and her own experience of an intense period of passivity and idleness, this chapter serves to read 'The Yellow Wallpaper' through a phrenological lens to exemplify how confinement, passivity and idleness contributed to the destabilisation of women's mental health in the nineteenth century.

As established throughout this dissertation, phrenology argued that human beings need to 'exercise' the brain using varied stimulation to engage *all* endowed faculties in order to achieve happiness and access to the higher faculties of the intellect. It is clear that Andrew Combe's text is based on phrenological principles which he regards as 'a branch of professional knowledge'.¹⁰⁹ Parallel to George Combe's *Constitution*, Andrew Combe asserts that '*non-exercise* of the brain and nervous system, or, in other words, inactivity of intellect and feeling, is a very frequent predisposing cause of insanity, and of every form of nervous disease'.¹¹⁰ This principle is explained further and argues that the cause of madness is a lack of nurture in the environment rather than a biologically determined nature:

The brain having literally nothing on which to exercise itself, becomes weak,

¹⁰⁶ Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Wild Unrest: Charlotte Perkins Gilman and the Making of "The Yellow Wallpaper"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 127.

¹⁰⁷ Horowitz, *Wild Unrest*, p. 128.

¹⁰⁸ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1998), p. 74.

¹⁰⁹ Andrew Combe, *Observations on Mental Derangement* (Edinburgh: Neil & Co. Printers, 1831), p. vxii.

¹¹⁰ Combe, *Observations*, p. 117.

and the mental manifestations are in feeble proportion; so that a person of good endowments, thus treated, will often not only exhibit imbecility of a fool, but gradually become irritable, peevish, and discontented, and open to the attack of every form of nervous disease and of derangement from causes which, under different circumstance, would never have disturbed them for a moment.¹¹¹

Having established a relationship between inactivity and mental illness, Andrew Combe saw that women's lifestyles made them particularly vulnerable and their experience seemed to support the correlation between inactivity and mental illness:

Look at the numerous victims to be found among females of the middle and higher ranks, who have no call to exertion to gain the means of subsistence, and no objects of interest on which to expand and exercise their mental faculties, and who consequently sink into a state of mental sloth and nervous weakness, which not only deprives them of every enjoyment, but lays them open to suffering, both of mind and body, from the slightest causes.¹¹²

The recognition of a link between inactivity and susceptibility to 'suffering, both of mind and body' is shared by Andrew Combe, Nightingale and Gilman. Nightingale's belief in this principle is evident, in a private note (c. 1851) she writes about her father: 'but not happy, why not? He has not enough to do – he has not enough to fill his faculties'.¹¹³ Nightingale's view that her father's unhappiness was caused by a lack of mental activity, and that a relatively short period of inactivity is capable of altering an individual's mental balance, echoes those of the Combes'. With regard to women she laments that 'so many of my kind who have gone mad for want of something to do' (p.8). Nightingale's 'Cassandra' confronts the reader with the realities of women's lives. Using ideas from phrenology, among other disciplines, she exposes the detrimental impact that forced inactivity had on the minds of women.

The narrator of 'The Yellow Wallpaper' can be seen as a case study of a woman who is subjected to a significant period of inactivity and confinement, albeit supervised and dictated by her physician husband John. While physical exercise is somewhat

¹¹¹ Combe, *Observations*, pp. 120-121.

¹¹² Combe, *Observations*, p. 117.

¹¹³ Nightingale, *Ever Yours*, p. 46.

permitted (the narrator comments on her being encouraged to take ‘air, and exercise’ (p.1)), mental stimulation is banned.¹¹⁴ She exclaims that she is ‘absolutely forbidden to “work”’ (p.1). Included in the category of ‘work’ is her writing; the narrator notes that it is ‘met with heavy opposition’ (p.2) and that ‘[John] hates to have me write a word’ (p.3). As established previously, Gilman believed her ability to produce literary works was proof that she retained her ‘natural faculties’. While John prevents the narrator from writing, with the rationale that monotony and scheduled activities are essential for healthy mental balance, the narrator believes, in line with phrenology, that ‘congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good’ (p.1). This adheres to the argument that minds need stimulation and variety to exercise the brain and engage different faculties. Andrew Combe shares the belief that women needed the opportunity to use their brain: ‘such persons have literally nothing on which to expend half the nervous energy which nature has bestowed on them for better purposes. They have nothing to excite or exercise the brain – nothing to elicit activity’.¹¹⁵ Andrew Combe’s argument reflects the environments depicted by Nightingale and Gilman. All three argue that a lack of stimulation and mental exercise prevent women from using their innate intellectual and higher faculties and that this is a cause of mental imbalance in women.

Phrenology opposed the widely held nineteenth-century belief that women were incapable of higher thinking and promoted the idea that women have the same number of faculties, including animal, moral and intellectual, as men. It was not women’s abilities which Andrew and George Combe criticised, it was the environment which women were forced to inhabit. This belief is present in ‘Cassandra’: Nightingale argues that ‘there is no longer unity between the woman as inwardly developed, and as

¹¹⁴ Charlotte Perkins Gilman, ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ and Other Stories (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1997), p. 1. All further references will be given in the text.

¹¹⁵ Combe, *Observations*, p. 120.

outwardly manifested'.¹¹⁶ Through a phrenological lens, Nightingale's reference to women 'inwardly developed' alludes to the existence of higher intellectual faculties. She states: '[God] gave [women] moral activity. But the Age, the World, Humanity must give them the means to exercise this moral activity, must give them intellectual cultivation, spheres of action' (p. 50). Nightingale reflects the key phrenological belief that the progress of a faculty was dependent on mental exercise. Nightingale's attitude concerning faculty development was optimistic: 'it is, indeed, true that, even after middle age, with such exercise of faculty, there is no end to the progress which may be made' (p.41). Furthermore, Nightingale and Andrew Combe share the belief that a woman's environment failed to allow women to access their higher abilities. Nightingale argues: 'passion, intellect, moral activity – these three have never been satisfied in woman. In this cold and oppressive conventional atmosphere, they cannot be satisfied' (p.29). It is apparent Nightingale believes women have 'passion', 'intellect' and 'moral activity', however these natural organs cannot be fulfilled in the 'cold and oppressive' environment. Nightingale pays particular attention to a woman's intellect:

Then comes intellect. It wishes to satisfy the wants which intellect creates for it. But there is a physical, not moral, impossibility of supplying the wants of the intellect in the state of civilization at which we have arrived. The stimulus, the training, the time, are all three wanting to us; or, in other words, the means and inducements are not there (p.30).

Nightingale argues that it was impossible for women to fulfil the desires of the intellect in a patriarchal society. Their inability was not as a result of moral obstacles, but the 'physical'; relating to the 'state of civilization'. Nightingale states that women long for 'stimulus', 'training' and 'time': three components needed to develop faculties. The problem lay in the gendered assumption that women were inferior to men, incapable of developing their intellect to the same level. Nightingale's strong belief that the

¹¹⁶ Florence Nightingale, 'Cassandra' (New York: The Feminist Press, 1979), p. 50. All further references will be given in the body of the text.

inequality of gender influenced a woman's belief that she was unable to lead an active life features in her personal letters: to her father on 27th January 1847, she asks 'why cannot a woman follow abstractions like a man? Has she less imagination, less intellect, less self-devotion, less religion than a man? I think not'.¹¹⁷ Nightingale is certain of the equality of the genders in terms of imagination, intellect, self-devotion. Women are unable to follow abstraction 'like a man' due to the lack of opportunities given to women. The argument advocated in 'Cassandra' is thus: 'is man's time more valuable than woman's? Or is the difference between man and woman this, that woman has confessedly nothing to do?' (p.32).

As this chapter has established, a woman's position in the domestic space failed to incorporate women's needs for mental exercise. Nineteenth-century patriarchy regarded women who attempted to deviate from their passive position as rebelling against their entire society. Therefore, women considered their aspirations as sinful, causing them to suppress their desires. Nightingale argues that in some instances, women feared to use their intellectual faculties and attempted to ignore the existence of their higher faculties, forbidding themselves to actively seek opportunities to stimulate their brain. It is the environment of nineteenth-century society and the constant enforcement of women's inferiority which conditioned women to accept their inferior position: '[women] have accustomed themselves to consider intellectual occupation as a merely selfish amusement, which it is their "duty" to give up for every trifle more selfish than themselves' (p.32). The indoctrination of women to regard intellectual occupation as 'selfish' led to patriarchy assigning a 'duty' to women to surrender aspirations for more fulfilling lives. Patriarchy prescribed duties to maintain a hierarchical structure within society, arguably out of the fear that women would become intellectually equal and destabilise the man's position as 'master'. At who Nightingale

¹¹⁷ Nightingale, *Ever Yours*, p. 30.

blames is explicit: 'but a woman cannot live in the light of intellect. Society forbids it.' (p.37). She argues that women '*must* act the farce of hypocrisy, the lie that they are without passion' (p.26). This suggests women feel they must ignore any qualities which contradict the passive/female ideal. According to Nightingale, a woman's passive position opposes a woman's true desire to be active: 'what else is conventional life? *Passivity* when we want to be active. So many hours spent every day in passively doing what conventional life tells us, when we would be so gladly be at work' (p.38). Nightingale depicts women as puppet figures, controlled and manipulated by the power above. To be passive, women must not be active. Similar conditioning is seen in 'The Yellow Wallpaper'. In reference to her husband, the narrator states: 'John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in a marriage' (p.1). The narrator's anxieties about the wallpaper are also treated with ridicule: 'he laughs at me so about this wallpaper' (p.4). The narrator expects to be laughed at by her husband; John's laughter presents him as active and the narrator passive. Furthermore, the narrator believes she is 'a comparative burden' in dereliction of her duties as a wife which are 'to be such a help to John, such a real rest and comfort' (p.3). It is apparent that one strong faculty of the narrator is her ability to imagine and construct stories. These qualities are met with opposition from John, causing the narrator to suppress her strengths:

He says that with my imaginative power and habit of story-making, a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies, and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency. So I try (p.4).

The narrator believes she must 'use [her] will and good sense' to suppress her abilities to imagine and write literature. Furthermore, the narrator's opinions on what *she* feels would improve her mental state are dismissed. She states: 'I sometimes fancy that in my condition if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus – but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition' (p.2). John forbids his wife to think of her condition and dismisses her opinions. Even in the narrative, which is

presented as her secret personal diary, the narrator corrects herself by stating: 'but John says'. The narrator believes she must act differently around John: 'I take pains to control myself – before him' (p.2). The narrator notes that '[John] says no one but myself can help me out of it, that I must use my will and self-control, and not let any silly fancies run away with me' (p.8). John has transferred all responsibility onto the narrator; identifying her 'silly fancies' as the cause for her mental imbalance. The narrator remains loyal and committed to John: 'he is so wise, and because he loves me so' (p.8). The narrator is one representative of women who felt guilty for wanting to deviate from their passive position in society and therefore strived to conform to patriarchal conditions. Women became conditioned to accept their inferior position and consequently surrendered desires of intellectual exercise which tempted them to deviate from their inferior position.

As hinted at previously, Nightingale argues that during the day, women act 'the farce of hypocrisy' by performing a role which ignores the desires of their intellect. For Nightingale, this leads to women daydreaming, which Nightingale describes as dangerous and destructive. In the introduction to 'Cassandra', Myra comments on Nightingale's view on daydreaming: '[Nightingale] was terrified of this habit of hers; she considered it either a symptom of mental illness or a sin' (p.8). Although daydreaming could be considered as an outlet for escaping reality, Nightingale condemns it as a 'sin'. Nightingale expresses a need for women to suppress this outlet of daydreaming: 'we fast mentally, scrounge ourselves morally, use the intellectual hair-shirt, in order to subdue the perpetual day-dreaming, which is so dangerous!' (p.27). She argues that women dream of becoming free from their oppressive lives but these aspirations happen 'never, with the slightest success' (p.28). This fear of daydreaming also features in Nightingale's private notes. In 1849, she comments on her nature: 'I have a moral, an active, nature which requires satisfaction [...] sometimes I think I will

satisfy my passional nature at all events, because that will at least secure me from the evil of dreaming'.¹¹⁸ In identifying dreaming as an 'evil' which is 'dangerous'

Nightingale is casting one escape for women as detrimental and one to be avoided:

It is the want of interest in our life which produces [daydreaming]; by filling up that want of interest in our life we can alone remedy it. And, did we even see this, how can we make the difference? How obtain the interest which Society declares *she* does not want, and *we* cannot want? (p.28)

Even during the night, seemingly away from patriarchal influence, the detrimental effects of their daytime deprivations affect women:

What [women] suffer – even physically – from the want of such work no one can tell. The accumulation of nervous energy, which has had nothing to do during the day, makes them feel every night, when they go to bed, as if they were going mad; and they are obliged to lie long in bed in the morning to let it evaporate and keep it down (p.43)

For Gilman's narrator, her hallucinations become clearer at night and she has the freedom to study this image closely. The narrator states that 'as soon as it was moonlight and that poor thing began to crawl and shake the pattern, I got up and ran to help her' (p.13). The entrapment of women becomes more obvious at night:

By moonlight [...] I wouldn't know it was the same paper [...] it becomes bars! The outside pattern I mean, and the woman behind it is as plain as can be. [...] By daylight she is subdued, quiet. I fancy it is the pattern that keeps her so still (p.10).

The image behind the yellow wallpaper visualises a woman's place in nineteenth-century society. This image develops as the narrator continues to be entrapped:

Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast [...] and she is all the time trying to climb though. But nobody could climb through that pattern – it strangles so; I think that is why it has many heads. (p.12)

The narrator becomes obsessed with freeing the imprisoned woman: 'I don't want anybody to get that woman out at night but myself' (p.12). The narrator begins to feel possessive over the wallpaper: 'But I am here, and no person touches this paper but me'

¹¹⁸ Florence Nightingale, *Ever Yours*, p. 40.

(p.13). After a frenzied effort to destroy the paper the narrator refers to herself as being the woman trapped behind the paper: 'I suppose I shall have to get back behind the pattern when it comes night, and that is hard! [...] It is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please!' (p.14). These statements demonstrate the narrator's perception of herself as the woman/women she sees behind the paper. At night she is permitted to try and escape as she becomes more aware of her situation and the restraints placed upon her.

The key image presented by Nightingale, Gilman and Andrew Combe is that of a confined woman; trapped in a world of tedium and imprisoned by a society that imposes patriarchal stagnation on women who would otherwise be free to naturally grow and develop in all aspects of their lives.

Conclusion

From a twenty-first century standpoint the creditability of phrenology has long been disproved: however, its unquestionable popularity during the nineteenth century presents it as a philosophy representative of its time which needs to be considered when studying nineteenth-century literature and culture. The popularity of phrenology is evident in the statistics: George Combe's *Constitution of Man* (1828) became the fourth bestselling book of its time, exceeding Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* by over 200,000 copies. As this dissertation has established, the core principles of phrenology were more complex than nineteenth-century and recent sceptics have suggested. Their ignorance of the core concepts is reflected by their derided term 'bumpology'.¹¹⁹ Phrenology transcended the touching of lumps and bumps and became an influential social philosophy which, as Shuttleworth as argued, was 'transformed into an explicit social programme'.¹²⁰

As the philosophy of phrenology permeated nineteenth-century society it undoubtedly influenced nineteenth-century literature. As each chapter has established, a number of popular women writers used phrenological principles to express how the brain functions and reacts to oppression, idleness and lack of mental stimulation. The degree to which the authors interacted with the philosophy varied. This was mainly dependent on the time each author published their literature: the peak of phrenology is considered to have been between 1820 and 1850. The decision to exclusively focus on women using phrenology positively provides a different perspective and complicates the assumption that phrenology was a patriarchal pseudoscience led by men who used the guise of 'science' to gain control. All of the women writers explored used phrenological principles to show how a woman's opportunity to abide by the natural laws asserted by

¹¹⁹ *The Phrenological Journal and Life Illustrated: A Repository of Science, Literature, and General Intelligence* (Oakland: The University of California Press, 1870), p. 158

¹²⁰ Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë*, p. 63.

Combe were limited by their confinement in the domestic space; the gendered assumptions of their abilities; and the enforcement of their inferior position in society. Chapter one focused on Mary Ann Evans's *Middlemarch* and the diametrically opposed gender ideals; using Dorothea's narrow environment and her perceptions of marriage as the main source of evidence to illustrate how knowledge and active lives are presented to the reader as masculine privileges. Evans's relationship with Combe provides evidence for the influence of phrenology in her literature. Chapter two focussed on Charlotte Brontë's protagonists of *The Professor* and *Villette* who led remarkably similar lives: the one distinctive difference being their gender. This influenced how Lucy and William used their knowledge of phrenology. While William had the freedom to indulge in phrenology, Lucy was caught between two opposing forces in society: phrenology which supported her to seek new opportunities and develop intellectual faculties, and nineteenth-century patriarchal passive/female ideal. Their use of the phrenological gaze depicted both narrators as products of society who were conscious of adhering to the hierarchy of gender. Chapter three used Nightingale's 'Cassandra' and Gilman's 'The Yellow Wallpaper' to illustrate how women were subjected to significant periods of enforced passivity, confinement and patriarchal control. As both writers were aware of the discourse of phrenology, their demand for their rights to 'exercise' their brains correlated with phrenology. Gilman's narrator in 'The Yellow Wallpaper' visualises her own position through an ambiguous hallucinatory image of a woman/women behind bars in her wallpaper. This image symbolises one position of women in the nineteenth-century society. The physical presence of bars are symbolic of the invisible obstructions placed to restrain women from seeking mental stimulation and opportunities to develop their knowledge or faculties.

Phrenology argued that the development of faculties was dependent on mental 'exercise', varied stimulation and engagement with education and teaching. The texts

studied in this dissertation demonstrate what often happened to women who were denied the opportunities to access or engage the intellectual and moral faculties. This dissertation has shown that phrenology was a widely followed philosophy which was multidimensional and influenced the discourses of gender, education and science. If more time and words were permitted, research into these areas would be a priority, to gain a fuller understanding of the influence of phrenology in the wider society of the nineteenth century and on other nineteenth-century literature.

Phrenology provided women with a platform to demand more rights to ‘exercise’ their brains by promoting the idea that women’s brains were essentially the same as men’s and women were therefore potentially as capable as men. The radical theories of phrenology offered women writers a framework and a ‘scientific’ rationale for the assertion of their abilities and their rights. As the establishment of phrenology occurred before the suffrage movement in the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, perhaps certain phrenological elements which advocated women’s rights were revolutionary for its time.

Gendered binary opposites remain a topic for debate today: in a speech at the UN conference this week, Emma Watson argued that ‘it is time that we all perceived gender on a spectrum instead of two sets of opposing ideals’.¹²¹

¹²¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-iFl4qhBsE> [accessed 23rd September 2014]

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Appendix 1:

Extract from Margaret Smith (ed.), *The Letters of Charlotte Brontë* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 657-659.

A Phrenological estimate of the talents and dispositions of a Lady:

Temperament for the most part nervous. Brain large; the anterior and superior parts remarkably salient. In her domestic relations this lady will be warm and affectionate. In the care of children she will evince judicious kindness, but she is not pleased at seeing them spoiled by over-indulgence. Her fondness for any particular locality would chiefly rest upon the associations connected with it. Her attachments are strong and enduring; indeed, this is a leading element of her character. She is rather circumspect, however, in the choice of her friends, and it is well that she is so, for she will seldom meet with persons whose dispositions approach the standard of excellence with which she can entirely sympathise. Her sense of truth and justice would be offended by any dereliction of duty, and she would in such cases express her disapprobation with warmth and energy. She would not, however, be precipitate in acting thus, and rather than live in a state of hostility with those she could wish to love she would depart from them, although the breaking off of friendship would be to her a source of great unhappiness. The careless and unreflecting whom she would labour to amend might deem her punctilious and perhaps exacting, not considering that their amendment and not her own gratification prompted her to admonish. She is sensitive, and is very anxious to succeed in her undertakings, but is not so sanguine as to the probability of success. She is occasionally inclined to take a gloomier view of things than perhaps the facts of the case justify. She should guard against the effect of this where her affection is engaged, for her sense of her own impatience is moderate and not strong enough to steel her against disappointment. She has more firmness than self-reliance, and her sense of justice is of a very high order. She is deferential to the aged and those she deems worthy of her respect, and possesses much devotional feeling, but dislikes fanaticism, and is not given to a belief in supernatural things without questioning the probability of their existence.

Money is not her idol; she values it merely for its uses. She would be liberal to the poor and compassionate to the afflicted, and when friendship calls for aid she would struggle even against her own interest to impart the required assistance; indeed, sympathy is a marked characteristic of this organisation.

Is fond of symmetry and proportion, and possesses a good perception of form, and is a good judge of colour. She is endowed with a keen perception of melody and rhythm. Her imitative powers are good, and the faculty which gives small dexterity is well developed. These powers might have been cultivated with advantage. Is a fair calculator, and her sense of order and arrangement is remarkably good. Whatever this lady has to settle or arrange will be done with precision and taste.

She is endowed with an exalted sense of the beautiful and ideal, and longs for perfection. If not a poet her sentiments are poetical, or at least imbued with that enthusiastic grace which is characteristic of poetical feeling. She is fond of dramatic literature and the drama, especially if it be combined with music.

In its intellectual development this head is very remarkable. The forehead is at once very large and well formed. It bears the stamp of deep thoughtfulness and comprehensive understanding. It is highly philosophical. It exhibits the presence of an intellect at once perspicacious and perspicuous. There is much critical sagacity and fertility in devising resources in situations of difficulty; much originality, with a tendency to speculate and generalise. Possibly this speculative bias may sometimes interfere with the practical efficiency of some of her projects. Yet, since she has

scarcely an adequate share of self-reliance, and is not sanguine as to the success of her plans, there is reason to suppose that she would attend more closely to particulars, and thereby prevent the unsatisfactory results of hasty generalisation. The lady possesses a fine organ of language, and can, if she has done her talents justice by exercise, express her sentiments with clearness, precision, and force--sufficiently eloquent but not verbose. In learning a language she would investigate its spirit and structure. The character of the German language would be well adapted to such an organisation. In analysing the motives of human conduct this lady would display originality and power, but in her mode of investigating mental science she would naturally be imbued with a metaphysical bias. She would perhaps be sceptical as to the truth of Gall's doctrine - But the study of this doctrine this new system of Mental Philosophy, would give additional strength to her excellent understanding by rendering it more practical, more attentive to particulars, and contribute to her happiness by imparting to her more correct notions of the dispositions of those whose acquaintance she may wish to cultivate -

J. P. Browne, M.D.

367 Strand:
June 29, 1851.